



WISEWOMAN

Success Story 11 WISEWOMAN and League of Women Voters Help Lansing Area Women Put on Their Walking Shoes

Nontraditional Partners Fill the Gaps, Bring Down the Barriers

Location Lansing, Michigan

Focus Remove the barriers that block underserved women from being physically active.

Strategy This WISEWOMAN project developed partnerships with the local League of Women Voters of the Lansing Area and a sporting goods store to provide low-income women in Lansing with high-quality athletic shoes and the opportunity to become physically active.

Levels of Success Many community benefits have resulted. The health department, league, and sporting goods store formed a public-private partnership that serves as a model for nontraditional partnerships. By reducing barriers to physical activity, the partnership aims to promote healthier citizens.

Results Seventeen WISEWOMAN participants will receive gift certificates and discounts, allowing them to buy a pair of high-quality athletic shoes.

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Low-income women face many barriers that make it difficult for them to become physically active. Buying a pair of high-quality athletic shoes is a luxury they cannot afford. To address these barriers, WISEWOMAN staff at the Ingham County Health Department submitted an application requesting funds from the League of Women Voters of the Lansing Area. The league donated \$500 to improve the health and wellness of low-income women in the county by promoting healthy lifestyle changes.

Because cardiovascular disease is the top health threat to women, WISEWOMAN staff proposed to use the \$500 to target sedentary lifestyles. WISEWOMAN staff and members of the league considered either providing athletic shoes or purchasing health club memberships with the funding. But because health club memberships are expensive, only a few could be purchased with the \$500. They decided to help more women by providing them with athletic shoes.

WISEWOMAN staff needed a conveniently located store that carried high-quality athletic shoes and would give the women a discount. They chose to purchase gift certificates from a local sporting goods store located less than a mile from the county health department and on the bus line. The store agreed to give WISEWOMAN participants a 20% discount on their shoe purchases. The gift certificate and discount combination allows the women to purchase a pair of high-quality athletic shoes with a \$30 gift certificate.

Using the donation from the League of Women Voters of the Lansing Area to provide low-income women with athletic shoes has removed an economic barrier and made it easier for these women to begin a fitness program. Providing the shoes is the first step, because many women who participate in the WISEWOMAN program do not own shoes appropriate for walking or exercise. In return, the women who benefit from this donation must remain in the WISEWOMAN program and demonstrate they are taking responsibility for making healthy lifestyle changes. For

example, they must fill out a lifestyle contract to participate in the program and be eligible to receive the athletic shoes.

WISEWOMAN lifestyle counselors follow up regularly with these women to see that the shoes are put to good use. The women also must visit the health department to attend group nutrition and fitness activities that encourage them to lead a healthier lifestyle.



Joy Whitten, LWVLA President (left), presents donation to WISEWOMAN's Nancy Jenkins.

Importance of Success

Seventeen Ingham County WISEWOMAN participants will benefit from the League of Women Voters of the Lansing Area's donation. By reducing a barrier—in this case, a lack of athletic shoes—WISEWOMAN is increasing the chances that these women will become physically active and improve their health. Other women could benefit from similar donations in the future.

So far, eight women have received \$30 gift certificates to purchase athletic shoes. Each of these women has demonstrated

an interest in leading a healthier lifestyle by participating in group activities and by meeting with WISEWOMAN's lifestyle counselor to discuss the progress she has made toward meeting her physical activity goals.

Lessons Learned

- Search for partners in the community who can help you remove barriers that block low-income women from being physically active. The donation from the LWVLA and cooperation of the sporting goods store are bringing down economic barriers and making it easier for low-income women to begin a fitness program.
- Realize that a donation of any amount can expand your program's ability to promote the health of women in your community.
- Look for potential funding opportunities in your local community. Keep an open mind to collaborating with unlikely partners.